

July 6, 1996
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5. "...these disclosures did not directly or immediately alter the course of the Vietnam War. The disclosures did disturb Nixon, and they became the occasion for a major congressional debate over the war. But there is no evidence that the actual publication of the Pentagon Papers reports caused Nixon to change his war policies."

[I believed for many years that this was the case. But on reading memoirs, biographies (Isaacson on Kissinger) and histories spring (after seeing Stone's Nixon) I discovered this was far from true.

MHH
agreeing
on show
(Kissinger),
NBC)

Nixon and Kissinger had never planned to reduce American ground forces in Vietnam down below 30-40,000, except in the context of mutual withdrawal, i.e., simultaneous withdrawal from South Vietnam of all North Vietnamese forces, and even then they probably did not really contemplate total withdrawal of US ground forces down to zero. But in the new public mood catalyzed by the revelations in the Pentagon Papers, Nixon began to perceive a necessity to withdraw US ground forces entirely, if he were to avert actions by Congress to cut off funds for the war entirely, i.e., to prevent him from continuing the war with the use of US airpower.

(As it worked out in 1973, total withdrawal of US ground forces facilitated, and may have been necessary to, Congressional cutoff of all funds including funds for airpower. But that was in the context of the Watergate struggle and might well not have occurred without that factor as well. As of 1972, in particular, Nixon felt a necessity to have an agreement with the North by the opening of the new Congressional term in January 1973 that would allow for the total withdrawal of all US ground forces, or face near-certainty that the new Congress would cut off all funds. That was a radical change from his previous planning from 1969 on--an internal Government acceptance of the prospect of total unilateral withdrawal of US ground forces--and the new climate of rejection of the war in the public and Congress surely reflected in part the reaction to the Pentagon Papers.

Moreover, this shift in internal Governmental planning was quickly reflected in a shift in the negotiating position--still secret from the US public--that was presented to the North Vietnamese. Indications of a US willingness to withdraw unilaterally were first offered in [CHECK DATE] and were made official in the spring of 1972.

Rudenstine is not alone in missing both the fact and the enormous significance of both the shift in Administration planning and in negotiating position (which made possible the October 1972 tentative agreement and the January 1973 formal Paris Accords: both

of which probably could have been achieved in 1969 if the shift had been made earlier). This is true of Stone and most journalistic and historical accounts, which thereby, like Rudenstine, underrate the impact on Administration policy of the publication of the Papers and the movement in public and Congressional opinion it evoked.